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Royal Devon  
University Healthcare  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Deciding Upon How Many Embryos To Transfer



Fertility  
+xeter

Whether you are undergoing self-funded or NHS-funded IVF/ ICSI treatment, you may have to make a decision as to how many embryos you wish to transfer. The law allows for up to two embryos to be transferred (up to three if the woman is more than 40 years old) however it isn't always advisable to transfer the maximum number of embryos.

## Twins or triplets?

This can seem like an attractive outcome, particularly if you have been trying to start your family for some time. However, multiple pregnancies and birth are known to be the single biggest risk to mothers and children during IVF treatment; we want to ensure that you have the best chance of having a successful pregnancy and a healthy baby with minimal risks to the mothers' health.

## What are the risks of a multiple pregnancy?

Complications of pregnancy are very rare in the UK but can lead to poor outcomes such as extreme prematurity (early birth), growth restriction (being very small), cerebral palsy (brain damage) and stillbirth or dying shortly after birth. These risks are around six times more likely with a twin pregnancy, although the actual numbers of babies affected is only 1-3% for the most serious risks. You are more likely to have a healthy, normal baby if you have a singleton pregnancy.

## When should I consider having a single embryo transferred?

We are able to reduce the chances of having a multiple order pregnancy by limiting the number of embryos transferred in a given cycle to just one. Elective replacement of a single optimal embryo where there is the availability of further optimal embryos which can be stored for future use, is a proven strategy to minimise the risk of multiple pregnancy. Data has shown that the cumulative effect of transferring a single fresh optimal embryo followed by subsequent transfer of optimal frozen embryos achieves a live birth rate comparable with the transfer of two embryos in the initial cycle but dramatically reduces the risk of a multiple pregnancy.

## What is likely to affect my chances of a pregnancy with transferring a single embryo?

It is important to remember that elective single embryo transfer (eSET) is not right for everyone and the decision should always be taken on an individual basis considering the following:

- Patient age
- Reasons for requiring IVF treatment
- Previous obstetric and gynaecological history
- Number of previous failed cycles
- The availability of embryos including their development and quality
- Ovarian response to stimulation

These factors will be discussed with you before and during your treatment cycle in order to help you come to an informed decision. With this approach we want to give you the best chance of having a successful pregnancy and birth. For most, the final decision often rests with the availability of additional top quality embryos for storage at the time of transfer, as not all couples will have spare embryos of a suitable quality to freeze.

## Will having NHS funded treatment affect the decision-making?

For those couples receiving NHS-funded treatment, a single embryo transfer will sometimes be mandatory as defined by individual criteria indicated by the relevant commissioning body. These criteria are designed to select patients most at risk of a multiple pregnancy and can be discussed in more detail with one of the team at Fertility Exeter.

**All couples should consider the risks before making any decision. It is important to note that putting two embryos back doesn't double your chance of pregnancy but it does increase the risk of a multiple pregnancy- being 'fit and healthy' doesn't mean you will avoid the complications of a multiple pregnancy. For more information on the risks of multiple pregnancies you can visit [www.hfea.gov.uk/about-us/our-campaign-to-reduce-multiple-births/](http://www.hfea.gov.uk/about-us/our-campaign-to-reduce-multiple-births/)**



# Feedback

Here at Fertility Exeter, we care about getting things right for our patients. As such we would welcome any feedback that you may have, to help us continually improve the services we provide. You can do this in a number of ways:



**Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)**  
**Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital (Wonford)**  
**Barrack Road**  
**Exeter**  
**EX2 5DW**



**Direct Dial: (01392) 402093**



**[rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net)**

You can also provide feedback about Fertility Exeter directly to the HFEA by using their online feedback tool:  
**<https://www.hfea.gov.uk/choose-a-clinic/rate-your-clinic/>**

## **“What went well could go better if .....”**

Please complete a yellow card, located in our waiting room, and put it in the box provided. The box is sorted weekly and suggestions are acted on accordingly.

Alternatively:

★ Complete our Patient Surveys on our website  
**[www.fertilityexeter.co.uk](http://www.fertilityexeter.co.uk)**

★ See our Patient Survey links in our emails.



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